Reflective Practice Portfolio

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Chapter 1

Introduction:

On career day in the first grade I dressed up like an artist. My mother decorated me with a beret, palette, brush and a paint-stained smock (she also told me that I'd better get used to being poor). I have always wanted to be an artist and I still always want to be an artist. In my admittedly biased opinion, there is no truer form of history than to study art past and present. It is the social commentary that no one really sets out to compose, making it scandalous, funny, tragic, and above all, honest.

Art is layered communication. I take pleasure in the liberty of creating a work that has the ability to speak on so many levels. As an artist, I am excited by the idea that a viewer, because of his or her individual experiences, can take something away from my work that I never intended to communicate. I want to make work that is poignant, intelligent, and a vehicle for viewer introspection.

I am daughter, sister, friend, wife, but none of those roles has changed the direction and capacity of my thoughts quite like motherhood. Having a human being completely dependent on you for its survival is quite a life-altering event. Whether it's hormones or providence, I would do just about anything to ensure the safety and success of my children.

Teaching just seems to come as a natural product of the roles mentioned above. I believe in the power of communication. Art is the ultimate

communication, multi-layered with the power to change minds. It is a gospel of sorts, and as a believer, I am compelled to educate people about its significance and their own ability to understand and speak the language.

My professional background is in museum education. The Frist Center opened in Nashville, Tennessee in April 2001. Since that time has hosted an array of art from the region, the country, and around the world. Unlike any traditional museum, the Frist Center for the Visual Arts has an exhibitions schedule that changes every 6 to 8 weeks. These exhibitions have included works from artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, Jacob Lawrence, and Claude Monet, as well as contemporary works by Rosemary Laing, Hiraki Sawa, and Mike Hoolbloom to name a few. The museum also shows ancient cultural art from places like Egypt, Africa, China, and Greece.

VISION

The vision of the Frist Center is to inspire people through art to look at their world in new ways.

MISSION

The mission of the Frist Center is to present and originate high quality exhibitions with related educational programs and community outreach activities.

The Frist Center was conceived as a family-friendly place. Besides the special programs and workshops offered for all ages, the museum offers the innovative Martin ArtQuest Gallery. ArtQuest activities are designed for people of

all ages. With 30 interactive stations, and the assistance of knowledgeable staff and volunteers, ArtQuest teaches through activity.

In countless college classes the questions “What is Art?” and “Who is an Artist?” have been debated and still, as far as I can tell, remain unanswered by an authoritative majority. As for me, I believe everyone is an artist and anything can qualify as art. I believe that perception and intention act as perimeters framing the definition of artist and art.

My classroom is constantly changing, not only with the variety of age groups constantly visiting the institution, but it also changes with each new exhibition hosted by the Frist Center. As the person who plans public programs, I have a classroom that can take a range of forms. Sometimes it is a lecture or summer camp, sometimes a workshop or a film. Sometimes my classroom is a partnership between the museum and other institutions. The work that goes into a program actually begins close to a year before the program even happens. Much time is spent in research determining the best programs, workshops, and lessons for museum visitors. For the most part, the programming is based on the changing exhibitions, but it is also based on art in the community and on works of art that the museum has yet to display.

My personal philosophy as a teacher is constantly evolving. When I first began teaching, I used the DBAE formula I learned as an undergraduate student. It was relatively easy to choose a piece of artwork from each touring exhibition and create a lesson or workshop around it. However, the longer I stayed at the museum, the more access I had to the curators, which allowed me access to the

foundational concepts that gelled exhibitions together. I began to see the larger themes behind the exhibitions and realized that these were universal. I began using these foundational themes as starting points for lessons, lectures, workshops, etc.

The most amazing aspect of teaching in a museum is the opportunity to have the art object directly in front of the student at the time of instruction. I realize now that much of the work of art is sometimes lost in translation when it is flattened by photography. This is especially true of contemporary works. I find that when students - children or adults - are in the presence of original artwork, the teacher has to do little to facilitate a lively and meaningful discussion.

Chapter 2

Service Learning and Narrative Inquiry In a Museum Environment

Framing

Although I had a brief introduction to the idea of multicultural education in my undergraduate studies, Dr. Hutzel's course, Multicultural Development, both defined and clarified philosophies related to the subject. The course text defines multicultural education as "an educational strategy in which students' cultures are used to develop effective classroom instruction and school environments. It supports and extends the concepts of culture, diversity, equality, social justice, and democracy into the school setting" (Gollnick and Chinn 4). Specifically, the course addressed the implementation of multicultural education practices in relation to teaching visual art. We were taught that as educators "it is part of our responsibility to provide for the investigation of multiple perspectives and options for living life to its fullest in an ever-changing technological world" (Ballengee-Morris and Stuhr, 12). While many of the practical applications of multicultural educational philosophy were directed toward a traditional public school classroom, I found that there were countless applications for the museum educator.

Service learning was among the most intriguing ideas with which I was presented. In short, service learning is a "commitment to appreciating the assets

and serving the needs of a community partner, while enhancing student learning and academic rigor through the practice of intentional reflective thinking and responsible civic action" (Duncan & Kopperud, 2008, p. 4). Service learning redefines the traditional roll of teacher and student into a collaborative learning environment. In this environment, participants function as both teacher and learner simultaneously while working to collectively create or problem-solve. "Almost everyone understands that a democracy functions best when its citizens are educated and involved. But not everyone understands that art activities can help promote this goal…we often neglect to think about how art has the power to connect us and help us think through community based issues" (Congdon, 2003, p.42). Because we transform from the traditional hierarchical rolls of "teacher" and "student" into a more egalitarian "participant," we find that we are "[forced] to see the needs of others as well as our own needs. We are called on to respect these people because they are, like us, human and vulnerable" (Duncan & Kopperud, 2008, p. 41).

This paper will describe the unforgettable experience of implementing service learning into museum programming. As a framework reminder, the groups that typically attend museum programs and activities range in age and are widely diverse. The particular group I will be discussing demonstrated a wide variety of ages, but only a few ethnicities. This group was brought together in order to incorporate service learning into museum education, as well as to work with the idea of using narrative inquiry as a meaning-making experience. Our lesson was related to the contemporary outdoor sculpture *Asa and Yehoshafat*

by Boaz Vaadia (Figure 1). Margot Ely proposes that, “Writing is inquiry. We write to know. We write to learn. We write to discover” (2007). I wanted my students to use the vehicle of writing to construct meaningful connections between themselves and the artwork. I titled my lesson “In Your Shoes” because I was anticipating that those who participated in the experience would place themselves autobiographically into a narrative about the sculpture. I planned for students to learn about how Vaadia creates his sculptures and how his culture may have influenced his choice of subject matter and materials. I hoped to achieve high quality service learning, which is defined as a learning experience “where students are active project creators and coordinators” (Cho, 2006). It was my goal for participants (children and adults) to work together and gain a deeper understanding of one another and the sculpture through dialogue and a storytelling exercise that related the proposed artwork. I further hoped that the experience would prove to fulfill the Frist Center’s vision statement.

Figure 1. Boaz Vaadia. *Asa and Yehoshafat*, 2000
Bronze, Boulder, and Blue Stone

The group of 19 people who participated in the exercise was a combination of 4 home-schooled students (4th, 7th, and 8th grade), 6 students from public school ranging in age from K through 9th grade, 6 senior members of the Jewish Community Center (JCC) in Nashville, and 3 parents. For my research I chose to interview one participant from each group with the exception of the parent participants. I also tried to interview participants that ranged in age. I hoped that by doing so, I would get a more comprehensive perspective on the learning experience. From the home-school group, I chose a fourth grade boy named Zeb. Zeb is from a middle class family and is taught predominately by his mother at home. I chose Laura from the public school group. She is a 16-year-old freshman at a suburban high school just outside of Nashville. She was born in Colombia, South America. Her family immigrated to the United States when she was three, and she is bilingual. Finally, I chose Howard from the JCC senior group. Howard is 68 years old and came to live in Nashville in 2005 after his home was destroyed by hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding.

Reflective Explanation of the Experience

The “In Your Shoes” lesson gained exponential dimensionality from the constructive participation of those who attended. My lesson plan was a linear sequence of events that, pared down, translated into something like this: see artwork, discuss artwork, divide into groups, write stories, read stories aloud. What transpired was a story in itself, a story that explains how my two-

dimensional line of a lesson plan morphed into a layered, multi-dimensional, pedagogy-changing experience.

As participants arrived at the Frist Center to take part in the “In Your Shoes” program, I evaluated the group. I noticed that students who were participating came from different academic backgrounds and did not know one another. They were generally quiet without the typical chatter that I am used to hearing from school groups that often visit the museum. The group of senior adults (referred to as the “Golden Age” club at the JCC) had a friendly rapport with one another. As I listened to them chat before the lesson began, I came to understand that they were in the practice of attending regular outings with one another.

I began by introducing the outdoor sculpture around which I had planned my lesson. I chose the outdoor sculpture because I see very few people actually take the time to stop and consider the artwork that is available (for free) outside the museum. I also chose the work because it is contemporary. I hoped, therefore, that there would be minimal preconceived judgments among the participants related to the artist or the work. As the discussion began, I noticed immediately that there was genuine interest and excitement that emanated from the senior adults from the JCC. They listened intently, posed questions, and nodded their approval when other’s commented. They gave just as much respect and attention to the students as they did to fellow adults. The attention they gave was genuine interest in the information being presented. Because the experience began on a note of respect, I was able to see trust budding between members of

the group. This excitement was infectious and soon most of students were also involving themselves in the discussion. I noted that there was no hierarchy between adults and children. I further noticed that the teenage students mirrored this behavior with the younger elementary aged students. The parents were the most reluctant to join in the discussion. They seemed unsure of their role at this point in the activity.

In retrospect, I believe it would have been ideal to break into groups right then and write our stories in the physical presence of the sculpture. Instead, because of the chilly weather and my concern over making sure everyone would be comfortable, I chose to move the group into one of the museum classrooms. I provided photographs of the sculpture, but a few of the participants commented that they would have preferred to have more time with the artwork.

By the time we arrived at the classroom, I noticed that the participants had naturally segregated back to standing near and chatting with other participants with which they had the most in common. I asked everyone to count off by fives to break into groups. By doing this, I was attempting to ensure that we would have integrated groups that included students, senior adults, and parents. Most of the groups were well integrated.

I chose to insert myself into one of the groups, in an effort to change the classroom dynamic; pulling the focus off of me as the instructor. I wanted each of us to look to the sculpture, to one another and inside ourselves for instruction. The problem with my choice to participate is that I could not completely observe the dynamics of the other groups. I also found that I was distracted from own

group discussion because I was trying to simultaneously monitor the progress of the others.

Although limited, I was still able to make some observations of the other groups. I could see animated discussions going on throughout the room. I also noticed that the parent participants, who had previously been reserved, were now participating in the discussions. Because of the way that the groups were divided, parents were in separate groups from their children. I noted active listening, writing, and occasional amusement among the members of each of the groups. I scanned the room 3 or 4 times, looking for participants who were disinterested or unengaged and was surprised to find that everyone was actively taking part. This is something that I rarely witness as a teacher. Typically in a group of this size, there are one or two students who are not engaged at any given point during my lesson.

I noted again, as I had during our earlier discussion that there was no apparent hierarchy of child to adult. This observation was supported with Howard's statement as he reflected upon the experience, "The kids were so intuitive and expressive. [It was] not like we were the adults and they were the kids. We were all the same." The group in which Howard participated was the only one that chose to give voice to the large rock beneath the figures, a part of the sculpture that was widely ignored by the other groups.

I am the Rock! Asa & Yehoshafat were canoeing and arrived at my location. They got out of the canoe and seemed really mad at each other.

She accused him of getting them lost. In defiance, Asa sat down on me, arms folded across her chest. Yehoshafat assumed his semi-standing position putting his heavy, angry foot on me. Why did they pick me? There are plenty of other rocks around, too bad I can't talk. Their silence. Their anger. And now I am stuck with them because their canoe just floated away. Now they argue about who didn't secure the canoe. Maybe they will sense my warmth and support. Their body language is so grey, cold, and jagged. Maybe they will pick up on my lighter, sunny composition and warm up to each other. I'll keep working on them. Will they open their arms and look around and see that the grass is really greener?

Laura also spoke about the experience saying, "We each told our ideas about what we thought happened or could've happened. There were different things we agreed on, and other things that we thought were better ideas." Her comment explained how the group worked together. In using the pronoun "we," she was unconsciously stating that she was empowered to suggest ideas as well as comment on the ideas presented by others. The participants in Laura's group played with the dimensionality of the figures, the human desire to climb, and various complications that arose from both.

There are the sculptures named Asa and Yehoshafat. Asa is 250 feet tall. Yehoshafat is up to 300 feet tall. I often dreamed of climbing it. So then one day I decided to climb the Asa sculpture. I got up to her lap

and suddenly she started to move. As she stood I tried to hang on, but then I lost my grip and fell 100 feet down. As soon as I hit the water I swam around her feet. I swam around the cliff she sat on.

So then I started on Yehoshafat. Since it was 300 ft it would be a long journey. A day later I was at his shoulders. When I woke up he was standing on the cliff. After he was on the cliff, he swung his arms and dove into the water. After I reached the surface there was a helicopter to get me. So then you shouldn't climb sculptures that keep on coming to life.

Zeb, one of the younger participants spoke about his group: "I did like the people in my group a lot. They were nice. They were helpful to me, they helped me to spell since I did the writing." This comment is especially telling in that he makes no delineation between the adults and students in his group. He uses the general term of "people" to encompass both. The group with which I participated demonstrated the same equality of power when it came to story suggestions. However, I felt like the group collectively expected me to take the lead. I was continually trying to deflect a management position in order to participate as just another member of the group.

Group members were able to build relationships within the groups. It was both interesting and exciting to see these relationships develop between people who had only just met. Zeb (age 9) described the progression of his involvement within the group. "At first I was nervous. Why? I know it's good for me to

socialize, and to write and put my thoughts with other people's. But, I was having to write and I was afraid I would forget something that would be very important. After it was over, I wondered why I was ever nervous at all because I felt pretty good." His comments articulate the vulnerability and courage it took for him to actively participate, as well as the subsequent trust that came about when he was accepted and positively reinforced by the other members in his group. The group discussions allowed individuals to empathize with the perspectives of fellow group members, an experience that built relationships within the groups. Howard described it like this, "Talking to the others made me realize other people's perceptions. It gave the objects more meaning. It helped me to open my mind and better express my feelings about what I was seeing." Laura also spoke about how this caused her "to be more open-minded –to hear other people's perspectives." Both of these participants speak about being open-minded, yet they come from different age groups, cultures, and socio-economic classes.

One of the participants in my group was a young man named Josh with a learning disability. I was concerned that Josh would be excluded or patronized as a result of his disability. I found, however, that he was able to approach the sculpture in creative and imaginative ways that caused me, not only to feel more connected to him, but also to the artwork. His ideas and input greatly influenced our final story because the group collectively recognized both the creativity and insight of his contributions. Josh's story ideas reminded me of a cartoon storyboard. He was particularly aware of the sensory issues within our story. He reminded group members of the sounds the sculptures would make if they were

alive. As the story evolved, one of the parent members (a female in her mid 30s) suggested the ironic humor in heavy rock figures being concerned about weight loss, while our group member from the Jewish Community Center explained why it would be funny if Ruth were continually chasing Naomi. According to Jewish religious tradition, when Ruth's husband died, she left her people to follow Naomi and live according to Jewish law. An excerpt reads as follows:

As soon as the lights go down, Yehoshafat the sculpture begins to move around. He sees Asa and says, "Hope you didn't have a rocky day."

"Not too rough," Asa replies, looking down to admire some work Boaz had done on his feet.

Just as they were discussing various changes Boaz had made to them that day, Ruth, another of Boaz's creations, jogged over to them. They heard her noisy approach as her stone layers jostled each time a foot hit the floor.

"Asa, you're looking a little chunky around the edges. You should be thin and fit like me. I lose a lot of weight jogging. I'm always following Naomi around!"

"I hear you and your mom-in-law are headed down to a museum in New Orleans," Yehoshafat said.

Naomi, who was coming around the corner, had to catch herself and realign her layers. "Oh boulders! Still waiting on Boaz to hook me up

with one of those Bronze poles. Yep, we're headed down to the Big Easy. Hopin' to get myself some beads."

Contemporary art is sometimes met with trepidation. Since there are not decades of history reinforcing its academic value, viewers are often reserved in their interactions with contemporary works. I observed that through the story-writing activity, we all developed a personal relationship with the artwork that was made richer through the discussion we shared with others in our group. Zeb, who had visited the museum previously to view an Impressionism exhibit said, "There was a big difference between this and the [Impressionism exhibit] because this sculpture was more creative." While it's hard to quantify creativity, his comments do imply that he built a positive relationship with this contemporary sculpture. Later he described the story that his group wrote about the sculpture: "Our story was about how Boaz made this sculpture. The story helped the sculpture be ingrained in my mind. It looked as if one figure was mad at the other because one had its arms crossed." The fact that Zeb refers to the artist by his first name is an indication that he feels a familiarity or kinship with the artist. This familiarity developed as Zeb and his group told the story of how the sculpture came in to existence.

My name is Boaz and I grew up on a farm in Israel. I loved nature and growing food. I moved to New York City in 1975 at the age of 25.

I was very different from my farm. I found construction workers piling broken rock for disposal. I hated to see so much rock go to waste so I asked if I could have the rock.

The way the rocks were piled up gave me an inspiration for a sculpture. I made two figures, one sitting and one standing. I wanted people to form their own opinion about my sculpture because there are so many unanswered questions.

What do you think?

Howard also described the way his relationship with the artwork was affected by the story-telling experience, explaining, "I learned that I can relate to art in a personal way through my words on paper." He went on to explain how his experience with the Vaadia sculpture has evolved into a situation where he is actively seeking out contemporary artwork. "We've been participating in the local art crawl to look at contemporary art in local galleries. We feel more empowered to participate and meet artists," he stated.

After each group had presented their stories and the experience drew to its close, I thanked everyone for coming. I expected the usual clamor as the whole group collectively heads for the door. Instead, I watched as group members introduced fellow group members to one another. Several of the participants asked to be included in future story-writing activities. I was also asked by both students and adults to e-mail the stories to them, so that they

could share them with family and friends. Many of us exchanged e-mail addresses.

When I later asked about what could be done to make this experience richer, each of the participants I interviewed mentioned the desire for more time both with their groups and with the artwork. For improvement Howard suggested, “maybe if we had a little more time, then we could’ve gone back outside and looked at the piece again as a group. Walked around it a little more.” My experience at the museum has programmed me to try to pack as much as possible into a small amount of time. Any activity that lasts for more than an hour is generally difficult, especially when children are included. Museum educators feel intense pressure to make their programs count, as it may be the first and last time we see a visitor. We do not generally have the opportunity to build ongoing relationships with those who attend our programs. Hearing this feedback has caused me to reconsider the way that I think about time. This particular group of people had a very positive dynamic. It would be nice as an educator to have the flexibility to respond to group dynamics and interest as opposed to the clock.

Conclusions

Personal Pedagogy:

> *I start the lesson in my usual way; a practiced thespian begins her dramatic performance. I energetically introduce the sculpture and the artist. I pose questions that I hope will initiate the Rube Goldberg machine of art interpretation in the minds of my students. My underarms are*

sweating, and between inflection and diction I am doing the language equivalent of juggling polka dot beanbags. I am in my element. The lively discussion that ensues informs me that my group is indeed hooked and that it is time to take the rest of this experience to the classroom. Now I grow nervous. According to my lesson plans, I have to pack away the thespian teacher and turn the reigns of teaching over to the students. I am not afraid to admit that I am scared. I am comfortable with controlling the instruction. I am afraid that relinquishing control will result either in derailed mayhem, or in the worse outcome of low participation where the room is silent and everyone is politely bored. It's difficult to perform a metaphorical "trust fall" with virtual strangers, when I have had such positive results doing things the way that I've always done them.

Because of this experience, I have begun to think deeply about my teaching practice. I realize that I have built my practice on dynamic lecturing followed by scripted discussion. I have had generally good results, which I define as happy participants who can regurgitate delineated information upon my request. This lesson forced me to relinquish my control over what the students were learning. Instead, I had to take the leap of faith that they would teach each other. I found that by doing this, I was able to become a student in my own classroom. I also discovered that the knowledge that they were able to construct together had a personal significance, which I believe will cause this learning experience to continue to grow even after students have left the classroom.

Service Learning:

Service learning will be a great benefit to future museum programming. By combining two age groups during this experience, the groups were able to gain a much broader understanding of the artwork. Each age group represented brought something unique to the discussion table. In the past, I have planned programs that are often compartmentalized to appeal to certain groups. By combining communities that rarely have a chance to interact, a richer, more meaningful experience was gained by all. Continuing to incorporate service learning into program planning will more successfully fulfill the museum's mission and vision statements.

Narrative Inquiry:

> *Those groups that appear to be finished are engaged in personal conversations. All of the participants, children and adults together appear to be laughing, talking, and enjoying themselves. The cynic in me surmises that this much enjoyment must mean that most of the stories will lack depth and connection to the sculpture.*
>
> *The time comes for each group to read their story aloud. I sit, prepared for mediocrity. The first group reads. I am impressed! They have dissected the relational aspects of the two figures in the sculpture and acted out a dialogue. The second group reads, and once again, I am surprised at the*

creativity and depth of the story and how it relates to the sculpture. I find that even I am thinking about the sculpture in new ways. This surprises me as I have researched it from what I thought was every possible angle.

A key reason that this experience was successful was the use of narrative inquiry. Autobiographical storytelling was something with which everybody could be successful, but also allowed for infinite exploration. I think this was reflected when participants commented that they wished for more time. As participants read their final stories, no two were even remotely alike. The groups showed equal excitement in listening to the stories of their peers as they did in presenting their own.

It was an honor for me to learn with the people that participated in the “In Your Shoes” program.

Chapter 3

Designing Meaningful Art Curriculum Around Changing Museum Exhibits

As someone with a background in museum education, I was anxious when I saw the course title for the spring quarter of 2010. *Designing Meaningful Art Curriculum* sounded as if it would be a course geared toward the classroom teacher. I fretted that I would have difficulty finding application of the course philosophies in a museum classroom where I rarely see the same student twice. As I began to peruse the assigned readings I was relieved to be introduced to ideas that when joined with a pedagogy of criticism and aesthetics motivated me to completely transform the way that I plan, budget and execute museum programs.

The intent of Dr. Eisenhauer's course was to think about curriculum design in terms of contemporary art and culture. The idea is that if curriculum is contemporary then it is, by default, relevant to the students and the teacher and therefore more inclined to be meaningful. Curriculum is redefined from the antiquated idea of data that is delivered or covered by the educator, into information that is first processed through the lens of contemporary culture and disseminated in a way that seeks the student's engagement as opposed to their rote memory. Gude states that "The goal is not to come up with a new orthodoxy, a single set of projects or ideas that sum up the totality of today's art discourses, but rather to think of our projects as interventions and additions to the current

curriculum that change the way students think about culture and artmaking" (2000). Ideally then, students would continue to construct knowledge even after they have left the classroom, or in my case, the museum.

During the course I was also introduced to the idea of overt and hidden curriculum. McCutcheon defines overt curriculum as "what school people intend that students learn and what teachers say they intend to teach," while hidden curriculum is "what students have an opportunity to learn through everyday goings-on under the auspices of schools, although teachers and other school people do not intend those learnings" (1998). It would have been easy to dismiss this as a public school issue, but it's something that happens in every educational setting, including museums. I had to take a look at what I was not teaching and I made a startling realization right away. As a teacher, I have inadvertently taught my students that only artists whose artwork is "fit" to appear in a museum create "real" art. While I have, of course, never stated this opinion (I most assuredly do not agree with it), my lessons, tours and discussions have focused mainly on the artwork that is on display in the museum and have left out pretty much anything that is not "institution-worthy." Further reflection led me to realize that I most assuredly communicate my personal preferences for artworks based on the enthusiasm (or lack there of) I show in relation to different works of art.

My failure to address visual culture is also a part of my hidden curriculum. As Darts states, "many of our students' visual experiences are absorbed and reproduced without adequate critical examination" (2006). My practice of only

addressing high art contributes to the non-examination of the images that constantly surround museum visitors outside of our walls.

While I've never taught professionally in a public school, I am under the impression that most art teachers are fairly autonomous when it comes to devising and carrying out of lesson plans (aside from adhering to state mandated standards). Museum situations often allow an educator to work with curators as well a group of art educators to devise ideas and to carry out programs and lesson plans. In short, we are, and are constantly surrounded by "art" people. We work, as it were, in a veritable art-bubble, where everyone involved has chosen visual art as an education and career path. Sometimes this immersion allows us to create a fortified hidden curriculum, which is strengthened by unspoken consensus. It's easier to overlook this hidden curriculum. There is an accountability that exists when one is singularly responsible for lessons that becomes obscured when groups of people are responsible. As a group member I fail to take the time to think about what is hidden, instead feeling a sense of confidence in our "group think." But in a group where most involved have very similar philosophies, this can be misleading. This hidden curriculum obviously finds its way into classrooms and gallery talks, but more subversively, it exists in the literature and wall text of each exhibition.

McCutcheon proposes that it's possible to improve hidden curriculum. This improvement happens through "reflecting on its nature and possible effects and opportunity for learning. Through doing this, teachers can improve the hidden curriculum, thereby rendering more of it overt; because it has been

reflected upon it moves into the intended realm" (1998). According to this statement, becoming aware of your own hidden curriculum is the first step toward progress.

Eisenhauer's course encouraged participants to think beyond incremental lesson plans. Instead we learned to think of curriculum on a larger scale, building our lessons from larger concepts. This idea was especially challenging for me because I think of my curriculum on an exhibition-to-exhibition basis. For each coming exhibition educators and curators meet together and discuss the content and 'big idea' of each exhibition. This is a very rare event in the museum world and our staff feels fortunate to work at an institution where curators and educators work together. My previous method of program development, from a curriculum, program, and budget perspective, was to segregate planning in relation to upcoming exhibitions. Educators also find that curators have a much different concept of a 'big idea.' Most of the time the big ideas for exhibitions are reduced down to one or two sentences, but it is difficult to get curators to reduce an exhibition down to one enduring idea. Looking back, each year's programming is compartmentalized according to exhibition. This also means that while I am reaching viewers/visitors who are interested in a particular exhibition, I am offering very little, if anything, to connect one exhibition to the next. Each exhibition requires the staff to start from scratch.

I realized that a common thread that I needed to make sure was running through all of my programming was a solid connection to the contemporary. This is done by default when it comes to contemporary exhibits, but is not something I

focused on when it came to historical artwork. Incidentally, I noticed that the further back in history an exhibition, the longer and more involved the curator's big idea.

When first confronted with ideas presented in the course, I had daydreams of opening up my own magically funded institution where both curators and educators first establish a big idea used to plan each year's exhibitions. Curators would have then sovereignty to "shop" for exhibitions accordingly, while educators built a solid foundation of curriculum that linked everything in the entire institution. But alas, this idea is not very realistic. In the absence of unlimited funding, museums have to scrounge and trade for every exhibition they are able to book. At the Frist Center we are bound by budget constrictions, the fact that we have no permanent collection, and, quite frankly, our "small town" status in some situations. The director of my museum explained the task of appealing to larger museums to loan their work to us like this: "I feel like I'm the skinny, quirky guy whose always trying to talk the head cheerleader into going out with me."

Because my first option is not realistic, I have arrived at a compromise. What if I were to look at the schedule of upcoming exhibitions, research them to the best of my ability and then find a big idea that transcends several of the exhibitions simultaneously? Not only would this give me a stable foundation that would last more than a couple of weeks (the typical length of one exhibition), it would also be a way for me to generate visitor's/participant's interest in other exhibitions. It would create commonality between exhibitions and also provide the relevancy needed to connect the viewers to the artwork.

I will use the 2010 exhibition schedule of the Frist Center to describe a new approach to the planning process based on the reading and information provided by my master's program studies. In order to give the reader the needed background information, I will briefly describe the exhibitions and dates for the year 2010:

October 2, 2009-January 31, 2010

Georgia O'Keefe and her Times: American Modernism from the Lane Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Between 1900 and 1950, a new America – a nation of skyscrapers, jazz, the Model T, and eventually the atom bomb – claimed a dominant position on the world stage. In response, artists searched for distinctly American ways of picturing this strange, exciting new century.

Thomas Hart Benton in Story and Song

Thomas Hart Benton believed that American folk culture was more genuine than the intellectual snobbery of New York-based Modernists. Benton strove to pay homage to rural America's people, history, and land by creating images that captured what he saw as the simplicity and dignity of everyday life.

Oliver Herring: Common Thread

To create his sculptures, Herring painstakingly photographs a model's body from all angles (although he thinks of his subjects not as models, but collaborators). He fastens each jigsaw-like fragment onto a polystyrene model of their form. Herring's play with color in his photographs gives these sculptures variegated surfaces and suggests the mottled nature of personal identity.

January 29-April 25

Heroes: Mortals and Myths in Ancient Greece

This exhibition presents one of the central figures of ancient Greek culture: the Hero. Greek heroes were primary characters in a complex mythology, subjects of local religious worship, and models for the ancient citizens. To the Greeks, however, they were not fictional characters, but mortals who had lived, died, and were worthy of worship.

February 19-May 16

Masterpieces of European Painting From the Museo De Arte De Ponce

This collection includes both Pre-Raphaelites and Baroque works inspired by classical mythology, ancient Greek and Roman history, the Bible, the poetry of Tennyson, and fleeting moments from everyday life.

U Ram Choe

Contemporary Korean artist U-Ram Choe's kinetic sculptures are made of delicately curved sections of metal, joined together in movable parts that are driven by soundless motors to expand, contract, or otherwise suggest the autonomic motions of such primitive life forms as plants and single-celled aquatic creatures.

June 18-Sept 12

The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957

Through garments and accessories, as well as video, photographs and fashion dolls, this exhibition puts postwar fashion into sociological and historic context.

Presense or Absence: The Photographs of Tokiro Sato

Trained as a sculptor, Sato first used photography when he had the idea of tracing light tracks next to one of his wire sculptures and capturing them with a camera. This experiment led him to the discovery that he could express himself through sculpture using photography as his medium to fuse light and space.

May 9-Jan 2

Chihuly at the Frist

This site-specific installation of glasswork included objects that represent the artist's most important series. The exhibition featured *Mille Fiori* or *Thousand Flowers* garden and the artist's *Sea Blue and Green Tower*.

October 15-January 23

Birth of Impressionism: Masterpieces from the Musée d'Orsay

This exhibit tells the story of the Impressionist movement, focusing on the tumultuous period of the 1860s and 1870s and the emergence of the New Painting out of the Paris Salon.

In the future, I would like to use this method to plan upcoming exhibition programming. However, since I am attempting this planning method for the first time, I have decided to start with a year that has already passed. I also thought it might be interesting to compare and contrast my results with the programming that took place without trying to find a big idea that connects these exhibitions.

After staring at the exhibition schedule and thinking for hours, I decided that trying to come up with one big idea to connect a whole year of exhibitions might be more challenging than I had originally hypothesized. I also noticed that the more I tried to find an overarching idea for the entire year (comprised of 10 exhibitions and countless works of arts), the more the conceptual connection between the exhibitions became tenuous. I decided that I would have to break the year into parts.

For the first grouping, I included: *Georgia O'Keefe and Her Times, Thomas Hart Benton in Story and Song, Oliver Herring: Common Threads, Masterpieces of European Painting, U Ram Choe; New Urban Species,* and *Heroes: Mortals and Myths in Ancient Greece*. I chose to use the big idea of human relationships with nature. This was a theme that was present in some form in each of the exhibitions. It is also an idea that is relevant to contemporary society. Program planning using this big idea will carry me through roughly the fist 6 months of the year. I chose the big idea of revolution for the second group comprised of: *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957, Presence or Absence: The Photographs of Tokiro Sato, Chihuly at the Frist*, and *Birth of Impressionism: Masterpieces from the Musee D'Orsay*.

Because of the amount of explanation I intend to give I will only narrate my planning process, in depth, for the first group of exhibitions. For the second group, I will explain the arrival of my big idea. As I was researching these exhibitions, I came across a review written by a local paper reviewing the U Ram Choe exhibit (as I mentioned earlier, this planning exercise is retrospective). While the review was generally positive, I noted that the journalist had noticed something that I had never taken into account before Dr. Eisenhauer's course. The article read, "The only hiccup in an otherwise impressive "New Urban Species" exhibit was the confusing juxtaposition of the show smack dab in the middle of a seemingly unrelated gallery exhibit "Master's of European Painting" (Bubis, 2011). I suddenly became conscious that visitors are noticing a lack of cohesion between exhibitions. They are looking for a way to relate these various

groupings of artworks. I also find that visitors almost always find contemporary art germane (even if they don't like it). However, from my experience they feel less pressure to discover personal relevancy with more historical works of art. Instead, they rely on the artwork's historical status and longevity as enough of a reason to view it.

My first order of business in planning was to figure out specifically how each of these exhibitions represented the big idea of human relationships with nature. Some works were more literally representational of this than others. For example, works from Georgia O'Keefe, Thomas Hart Benton, and the Ponce show were all comprised of paintings that either depicted humankind interacting with nature, or depicted the evidence that humankind had interacted with nature.

The remaining exhibitions in the group had more conceptual ties to the big idea. *S Swing J,* a work by Oliver Herring consists of an enlarged monochromatic photograph portraying a couple caught during a romantic moment, the artist then overlays this photograph with a large transparency of vines and flowers. The curator describes it thusly, "Two figures are surrounded by vines and we wonder if they, like Apollo and Daphne, are declaring new boundaries between plant and animal or art and life" (Edwards, 2010). The big idea is signified within the *Heroes* exhibit in the way that ancient Greek culture explained the attributes of nature with mythology. The actual gods and goddesses symbolizing the realm of nature including that which existed outside the realm of their explanation (weather, death, etc.), and heroes (who were mortal) representing humankind's triumphant interactions with nature. The U Ram Choe artwork is comprised of

large organic forms that mimic flowers opening and closing, or animals such as fish. Choe replaces life with shiny metal and motors.

I chose the big idea of revolution (a fundamental change) for the second group of exhibitions. The Couture exhibit shows a revolutionary stage in women's fashion reflecting dramatic changes in societal definitions a feminine silhouette. Tokihior Sato creates revolutionary landscapes by challenging our perception of what defines landscape. Chihuly revolutionized craft into fine art and the Impressionists revolutionized painting.

After finding commonality within the exhibitions, I am now ready to explain the program planning process for the first group of exhibitions. Programming includes film, lectures, tours (for both adults and children), Kids Club (a one hour lesson and art activity for children ages 5-10), and family day (a combination of special performances and activities). In the past I have tried to relate my programs to specific exhibitions. Now, I will attempt to tie the programs into my big idea and from there relate them to various works within the exhibitions. I want to fortify my planning with ideas that will be personally significant to the museum's visitors. For each program I want participants to be challenged to think about humankind's affect on nature, as well as their own personal relationship with nature. This is something that reiterated to lecturers, tour guides, and in program introductions. Also, in response to my observations about our hidden curriculum, I want to include images and explanations of other works of art that are less recognized and not currently on view in the institution.

For the O'Keefe, Benton, Ponce, and Heroes exhibits there will be a mandatory "Curator's Perspective" lecture which respectively deals with each grouping of works in an academic manner. The original curators of the collections traveling from the museum that houses the collection permanently typically do these lectures. From here, depending on my budget, I am free to schedule as I wish, under the condition that the director of education approves. I would first plan a lecture with Jonathan Bremer, a philosophy professor from Vanderbilt University who teaches a course called "Green Cities." The course deals with "interpretations of 'nature' and 'sustainability,' human settlement patterns, democracy, economic sustainability, sprawl, environmental justice, and the implementation of urban environmental principles" (2011). This lecture would ideally take place at a time when O'Keefe, Benton, Oliver Herring and Heroes were simultaneously on view. I would supply him with the big idea and images of works from the above-mentioned exhibits asking him to speak about the works of art in relation to his area of expertise.

For my film choice I would show *Walkabout* (1971), directed by Nicholas Roeg. The film tells the story of two young Australian children who become stranded in the outback and meet an Aborigine on walkabout, a ritualistic separation from his tribe. This film showcases the human relationship with nature in a more complex and subtle manner than more recent counterparts such as Avatar (2009).

Among the most significant plans would be to schedule tours that utilize the big idea. Normally tours are scheduled per exhibition. These tours would be

billed as bridge tours that connect the artwork in the institution. It would be impossible to show and discuss all the work on view; however, visitors would have the opportunity to see a variety of artworks connected by a larger concept. Tours allow museum staff see groups of people and have the opportunity to interact with them as they learn about and respond to artwork. We see school groups (typically children), community groups, and then we have a more social tour that we call “Artini” that is on offered on Friday nights with a cash bar.

Kids Club is a program offered for kids ages 5-10. Because it happens monthly, I would be responsible for coming up with 6 one-hour lessons under the big idea of human relationships with nature. For each lesson I would choose two informing artworks. One of the works would be on view in our galleries, and the second would come from another source. An example would be a lesson based on U Ram Choe’s *Jet Hiatus*, 2004 a sculptural work that resembles a large prehistoric fish and a work by Rivane Neuenschwander entitled *Love Lettering* (2000), which is a video of several swimming goldfish, each with a word from a love letter attached to its tail. The group would compare and contrast the works of art and how each artist has used a form from nature and altered it. Their assignment would be to take a form from nature (plant or animal) that they feel personally connected with and alter it in a way that communicates their specific relationship with their chosen form. No humans should be present in their finished pieces, only the altered natural form. Participants will be allowed to use watercolor, colored pencils, and collage (magazines and glue) to create their work.

Family day is an event held biannually that allows free admission, performances and activities for everyone. Ours would be held in the spring. The works on view at that time would be *Ponce*, *U Ram Choe*, and the *Heroes* exhibit. In the past, I have tried to focus one performance and one activity on each of the larger exhibits and the contemporary work sometimes gets lost in the shuffle. Using big idea planning I would hire Janet Ivey, a performer from NPT's popular kid's show "Janet's Planet." Her interactive performance would feature songs about humankind's relationship with nature, and how that relationship is manifested in mythology and would be followed by a fun question and answer session led by Janet. The Adventure Science Center, an institution with which we often partner could do scientific demonstrations related to the way humans affect nature. Story time books would be *The Lorax* by Dr. Suess, and *Papa, Please get the Moon for Me* by Eric Carle. After each story, the storyteller would discuss the book with the listeners.

While these are just a few of the planning ideas I came up with, they do show that it is possible to create a conceptual link between exhibits that look nothing alike were not intended to connect. There are benefits to looking at exhibition planning in much the same way a public school teacher might devise a unit plan. The most obvious benefit is to the visitor who will hopefully interact with more than one exhibition, see relationships between them, and because of the universality of the big idea, make personal connections with the artwork. The second benefit is that the education staff has overarching concept that will lead educational programming through approximately 6 months of planning. Instead of

trying to plan for each exhibit separately, we see all of the exhibitions through the lens of the big idea. The drawback to using this method of planning is that the visitor will be presented with less historical data about the artwork on display, which is something many visitors expect from our institution. A difficulty I did not anticipate was that the planning was a little more involved than I expected. Some of my initial ideas were weak and only tenuously tied to the big idea and specific artworks. It was also tempting to turn all the programs into “save the planet” rhetoric as opposed to opening a real dialogue about human relationships with nature. I had to look for balance by thinking more about open-ended questions and less about judgments.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

The program at OSU has immeasurably affected my personal teaching pedagogy as well as my philosophy regarding the planning and implementation of museum education programs. I knew about big ideas when I started the program, but I did not fully understand their definition or how they worked to inform curriculum. Before this program I thought a big idea could be a sentence so long that it required a semicolon. Now I realize that a big idea is no more than a word or two - an enduring idea that transcends time and culture - representing what it means to be human. This creates a large umbrella under which to plan programming and curriculum.

Using the big idea concept to create artwork of my own helped me to see how one big idea could evolve into so many different works of art. In the past I have racked my brain trying to come up with creative ideas, and found myself doing a modified version of something I had done previously. I believe it is successful because it puts the concept before the media. Instead of thinking, “I will make a painting, or a print, or a sculpture,” I think instead that I will address an issue with visual communication. The media just naturally falls into place after the concept is developed. The dreadful moments of staring at a vast blank canvas are gone.

Because our exhibition “big ideas” were more pointed and detailed than what big ideas are intended to be, I sometimes had a hard time fitting programming and curriculum under the narrow umbrella the curators had

provided. I found that programs were a bit repetitious and lacked creativity. Now, even if I can't get all the staff on board to really understand the concept of big ideas, I can at least pare down the curator's version into something more universal. I can widen the umbrella, and as it expands so do my possibilities for programming and curriculum.

Ideally, I would like everyone on both the curatorial and education staff to attend a class, meeting, or even a workshop that addresses big ideas. If this were to happen we would all have the same understanding of the philosophy. If curators were to plan several exhibitions under one big idea, it would make planning easier and more cohesive for the education department. It would also link exhibitions (we have as many as five on view simultaneously) so that visitors would be motivated to make connections between them.

The Frist Center wants to "inspire people through art to look at their world in new ways." I believe that art criticism is a way to accomplish this objective. It is easy in a museum environment to list facts. In fact, many of our visitors expect us to do just that. Using art criticism to "see" an artwork is initially frustrating for some visitors. They would prefer that, as one woman on a tour commented, "you just tell us what it means." This reaction, however, is short-lived once groups actually begin to participate in drawing meaning from a work of art. Facilitating a group, especially one with a wide variety of ages, as they verbally create meaning from artwork is truly humbling for an educator. These people are able to detect treasure troves of meaning available in artworks that academia and historians will never perceive. The reason lies in the fact that no two people see

artwork the same way. Historians have never had the experiences of these individuals, nor have they been a part of this particular group dynamic. I find that I can still throw in a few historical facts or quotes as they relate to the unfolding discussion. I continue to grapple with how much data/historical facts really add to the discussion. I'm not sure if I hold on to it because it is important and needs to be said, or because visitors and my superiors expect me to relay that sort of information. There are times when it really adds to the discussion, but at other times introducing historical or biographical information seems to nearly shut it down. In these cases it is as if the facts that I have offered the group become the "real" meaning of the work of art, while our discussion was just supposition.

Experiencing artwork in this way causes the viewer to build a personal and meaningful relationship with a piece of art that is not contingent on its aesthetic appeal or its historical importance. People feel empowered to reserve judgment and criticize a work of art. We often think of the word "criticism" in a negative light, as a way to communicate disapproval. When looking at art, we focus on the critical part of criticism. Instead of looking for what we disapprove of, we are looking for the essential or the critical aspects of the artwork. We search for what is important, what is significant. When we seek these we are rewarded with layers of meaning.

I thought I had a thorough understanding of multiculturalism, but I found myself responding to the readings and instruction related to multiculturalism in both a personal and professional way. Personally, I have never thought of myself as a racist. If anything, I think I've been guilty of arrogance regarding my beliefs

on racial equality. I thought that I was forward thinking and a champion of equal rights. The assigned readings (particularly the chapter by Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* and the article by Williams on "Classroom use of African American language") have both caused me to re-evaluate myself and to be a little more humble in my assessment. I am convicted that I am guilty of both racist thoughts and racist behaviors, even though neither was ever intended. The change has been in my perception, but I expect it to have an exponential impact on the way that I deal with all people, including students and visitors at the museum.

In order for my classroom to be truly multicultural I am realizing that it must participate in the discourse of current issues that are relevant to the students lives, as well as be a place where "border studies" take place. This is the awareness that develops as a result of communities coming into meaningful contact with one another or in other words "service-learning." Gone is the idea of the guest speaker, the performer who singularly defines a culture to a glazed student audience. More meaningful, are groups interacting with one another, participants who are both teachers and learners. My dilemma is how to motivate cultural groups to want to be a part of this sort of learning. Once they actually partake, they are sold on the idea, but how do we initially get them to participate?

Professionally, I am excited by the prospect of adding service learning as a way to promote tolerance and understanding between groups of people that rarely interact. After being so personally convicted by the offerings of the course, it was motivating to see a practical application of how to put some of the theoretical principles into action. While many of the lessons I learned throughout

the program focused on the classroom, this is something that I can apply to programming as well.

Since most of the people who visit the museum are expecting a positive experience, many of the social tensions that may exist in an academic setting (like school) are relaxed. People choose to be at a museum. There is no law that demands their attendance, and they are most often separated from peer groups that greatly influence their perceptions of other people. With social boundaries at ease, participants often times feel more open to learn from one another.

We have an outreach program at our institution that directs its efforts to under-served communities. In the future, I hope to work with my outreach colleagues to invite some of these community members to participate in programs. In the past we have had programs for the general public, and then special programs that we arrange for the “community partners” we serve in our outreach program. I hope to integrate this programming to create service-learning opportunities. My biggest difficulty so far has been the challenge of physically getting participants to attend, even when programs are free. Most programs happen on nights and weekends and that can make for difficult planning, especially for those without transportation or difficult work schedule. Since there’s no consequence for nonappearance, many do not attend. I am working to frame these opportunities as exciting and fun to encourage attendance.

As I continue my journey in art education, I hope to spend more time thinking about visual culture and how it informs and guides our perceptions. Art is

literally everywhere, and human beings need to be equipped with the knowledge to critically evaluate the images with which we are bombarded. Museum art is set apart – holy. It is curated in academia, and deemed worthy for the masses. But it is not the masses that are attending museum openings. Every now and then a blockbuster exhibition from ancient Egypt will bring in a flood of onlookers. But for the most part, the masses are on facebook. They are watching televisions and manipulating the touch-screens of ipads and smartphones. People need the tools to decipher this constant visual language, and museums need to have their fingers on the pulse of this currency. I see that people who attend most of my adult programs are over 50. The exception would be lectures and programs that deal with contemporary art and issues. What will happen in the next 50 years as a new generation fills their shoes? I suspect that the viewers of the future will present a whole new challenge to museum curators and educators. If exhibitions are not proven to be relevant to contemporary society, I surmise that there will not be the funds to display them.

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